



RACIAL AND ETHNIC APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY HEALTH

"At Cherokee Elementary, I've noticed that since we've had Cherokee Choices in our school, the students are much more aware of the necessity of physical exercise and eating healthy foods. When they come to the library, they're looking for materials on cooking and about their bodies and maturing. We see them out walking on our track, and they're trying to be healthier overall."

—Cherokee Elementary School teacher

REACHing Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in Cherokee, North Carolina

Who We Are

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians coordinates the Cherokee Choices/REACH 2010 Diabetes Prevention Program.

- Cherokee Choices includes three components: mentoring for elementary school students, work site wellness programs for adults, and health promotion activities at local churches. It is administered by the Health and Medical Division of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.
- The cornerstones of this program are listening to the community and providing social support to increase physical activity and promote well-being and healthy choices, which can reduce the risk for obesity and diabetes.

The Problem

- Cherokee men and women are twice as likely to be obese as members of other racial and ethnic groups in North Carolina.
- The prevalence rate of type 2 diabetes among Cherokee men and women

combined is 23.8%. This rate is more than three times the combined rate for men and women from all other racial and ethnic groups in North Carolina.

The Solution

- Cherokee Choices works to mobilize the community to confront environmental and biological factors that put Cherokee people at higher risk for diabetes. Our efforts include addressing issues related to racism and mental health; creating a supportive environment for community participation; and developing policies for schools, work sites, and churches that promote positive health changes.
- Mentors work with elementary school children and staff to develop lesson plans on self-esteem, cultural pride, conflict resolution, emotional well-being,

and health knowledge. These mentors also developed a weekly after-school program to enhance teamwork, cultural awareness, and physical health.

- Nutritionists, dietitians, and fitness workers help tribal members participate in activities at their churches and work sites that are designed to help them reduce stress, eat healthier foods, and increase their physical activity levels.

Our Achievements

- Cherokee Choices has changed the culture of local schools, allowing policy changes that support physical activity programs for students and staff.
- To promote healthy eating, the Cherokee Central School System Board reduced the amount of saturated fat allowed in school meals.
- A significant increase in healthy eating and physical activity has been reported in Cherokee schools and at participating work sites; 96% of school participants said they know how to make healthier food choices.

Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) is a community-based public health program funded by CDC to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.

www.cdc.gov/reach



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION





Mobilizing Community Resources

Cherokee Central School System; Cherokee Hospital; Cherokee Diabetes Clinic; Community Club Council; Cherokee Human Resources; Healthy Cherokee; Cherokee Central School System Board; United Methodist Church; Latter Day Saints; Cherokee Tribal Planning Office; multiple Cherokee work sites.

Our Achievements, cont.

- Some program participants have been able to decrease or eliminate their use of medications for diabetes and high blood pressure.
- We produced a documentary called "Generations of Wellness," which provides positive stories and role models for the community.
- Five area churches and 170 church members are involved in the Walk to Jerusalem project, where participants try to walk the equivalent distance between Cherokee and Jerusalem. Participants have collectively walked more than 31,600 miles in 6 months. Progress is tracked on a map at each church, and celebrations are held periodically to keep people motivated.

Our Future

The Cherokee Choices/REACH 2010 Diabetes Prevention Program hopes to expand to incorporate more schools, work sites, and churches. We will share our knowledge and promote development of similar programs in surrounding counties.

We will seek funding to create a more walkable community with greenways and sidewalks. As our program grows, we will try to show the link between our program and health care costs paid by the tribe, to illustrate the value of investing in prevention.

Getting the Word Out Locally

- "Students Lend a Leg to Fight Diabetes Among Cherokee," *Asheville Citizens-Times*, February 26, 2004.
- "Living With Diabetes," published monthly in *Cherokee One Feather*, the weekly newspaper of the Tribal Council of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.
- Three 30-second television ads shown throughout western North Carolina, 2005–2006.

Generating New and Exciting Science

- "Cherokee Choices: A Diabetes Prevention Program for American Indians." *Preventing Chronic Disease* [serial online] 2006;3(3). Available at http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2006/jul/05_0221.htm.

Keys to Lasting Change in the Cherokee Community

Our program's community-based participatory approach has prompted strong community involvement and earned respect from community members. This approach makes Cherokee Choices different from the top-down programs typically provided by social service agencies in Cherokee communities. As a result, community members have expressed interest in using the same techniques to deal with other local health issues.

Now that community members have seen positive changes in their children and their co-workers, they are learning that a diabetes diagnosis is not inevitable. The philosophy that underlies the Cherokee Choices program is that conducting multiple activities at the same time can bring about community and system changes.

REACH FOR MORE INFORMATION



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